

A Work Project, presented as part of the requirements for the Award of a Masters Degree in Management from the NOVA – School of Business and Economics.

OUTCOMES OF COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE – A STUDY ON A  
PORTUGUESE RESTAURANT CHAIN

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A Project carried out on the Human Resources course, under the supervision of:  
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## **Outcomes of Communication Competence – a study on a Portuguese restaurant chain**

### **Abstract**

This research studies the mediating role of satisfaction with both organizational integration and supervisor communication on the relationship between communication competence and both trust in the supervisor and job satisfaction, using a sample collected from 237 employees of 21 restaurants from a Portuguese restaurant chain. As expected, satisfaction with organizational integration partially mediated the relationship between communication competence and both trust and job satisfaction. However, satisfaction with supervisor communication did not mediate those relationships. These results can be explained by the supervisors' role of representatives of the organization, showing that communication competence is a key link that should be trained.

**Keywords:** communication competence, satisfaction with organizational integration, trust in the supervisor, job satisfaction

## Introduction

Communication plays a central role in all the aspects of not only social but also organizational life (Pina e Cunha *et al*, 2007), and is present in every little task performed. Defined as “the formal as well as informal sharing of meaningful and timely information” by Zefanne *et al* (2011: 78) and described as “the process by which people turn their ideas and feelings into a common symbolic currency and transmit them to others” (Pauly, 1977: 11), proper communication tends to bring benefits for all the parties involved and contributes a great deal to the organizations’ success. In this sense, the impact that communication has on the several aspects of business environment has been studied throughout decades (Rogers and Roethlisberger, 1952; Boyd, 1966; Cox, 1968; Athanassiades, 1973; Baker, 1980; Kohlrieser, 2006; Campbell *et al*, 2007 and Bisel *et al*, 2012).

Successful communication depends heavily, among other factors, on the communication competencies of the sender of the message (Berman, 1989; Spitzberg, 2011), the way the content of the message is conveyed (Kohlrieser, 2006; Bisel *et al*, 2012, Van Horn-Cristopher, 1996) and how the receiver interprets the message (Baker, 1980; Cox, 1968).

Previous research demonstrated that communication enhances several organizational outcomes, such as employee participation, involvement and job performance (Thomas *et al*, 2009), trust (Zeffane, 2012), job satisfaction (Wulandari *et al*, 2011) and commitment (Varona, 1996; Zeffane, 2012). Since communication “is a potential contributor in building effective interpersonal and harmonious working relationships” (Raina *et al*, 2012: 524), it is critical that organizations make efforts in

order to have high levels of communication competence, especially employees in managerial positions.

The present study aims to analyze the role that communication competence has with satisfaction with communication (supervisor communication and organizational integration) as a mediator on both job satisfaction and trust in the supervisor. Even though there has been studies on communication competence related with the challenges that some jobs face regarding cultural communication differences (Downing, 2011; Raina *et al*, 2012; Shen *et al*, 2012 and Vijaya *et al*, 2010), little is known when it refers to the impact that communication competence has on the organizational life, particularly in how employees appraise their jobs (job satisfaction) and the relationship with their supervisor (trust in the supervisor).

#### *Relevance of Communication Competence for Trust in Supervisor and Job Satisfaction*

Communication competence can be described as the ability to communicate with others in a proper, effective, clear, attractive and satisfactory way (Spitzberg, 2011). Pundziene *et al* (2007) refer the usage of appropriate language, the active listening, the encouragement of feedback, the development of a climate of trust and the ability to influence others as some of the key communication competencies for a successful communication. Sriussadaporn-Charoenngam *et al* (1999) conducted a study assessing the kinds of communication knowledge and skills that were most associated with communicatively competent members and concluded that employees perceived communication competence in three distinct areas: strategic - communication knowledge, with the ability to avoid conflicts, display of respect, use of correct

pronouns, politeness, tactfulness and modesty; tactical - communication skills, which consisted of giving instructions, advice and feedback, providing, receiving and seeking information, listening, persuasion capabilities and networking; and behavioral traits, with cognitive abilities such as empathy and cognitive complexity. Therefore, a competent communicator can be seen as a person who is able to maximize his goal achievements through communication (Berman *et al*, 1989).

Moreover, a relational leadership style is a considerable predictor of supervisor's communication competence, and leadership may be considered a form of competent communication composed by both affective and cognitive strategies (Madlock, 2008).

Interpersonal trust, as McAllister (1995: 25) defines it, is the “extent to which a person is confident in, and willing to act on the basis of, the words, actions and decisions of another”. Being a relationship between two parties, it involves the voluntary acceptance by the trustor of the risks involved on the other party's actions (Thomas *et al*, 2009).

Several studies (Ruppel *et al*, 2000; Thomas *et al*, 2009; Zeffane, 2011) have demonstrated that effective and open communication is a predictor of the development and maintenance of employee trust. Thomas *et al* (2009) goes a bit further and concludes that the quality of information predicts trust in the relationships with coworkers and direct supervisors, while quantity of information predicts employees' trust on top management. However, the link between communicator's competence and the trust that employees have on those communicators is a relationship that has no major developments in the literature. In a fast changing world, it is more and more important that the basis of organizational life relies on relationships of trust between the interveners (Ruppel *et al*, 2000).

Job satisfaction is also an important variable when referring to communication and its outcomes. As Madlock (2008:62) states, “when leaders communicate effectively, their followers experience greater levels of satisfaction”. One of the most used definitions for the term job satisfaction is “a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences” (Pina e Cunha *et al*, 2007: 180, quoting Locke, 1976). Job satisfaction is one of the most significant human results of the job itself, since it has positive impacts on organizational commitment (Jui-Min *et al*, 2012; Igbaria *et al*, 2004), reduces the turnover intention (Jui-Min *et al*, 2012 and Baker, 2004), the absenteeism (Baker, 2004) and the intention to leave the organization (Igbaria *et al*, 2004) and has been, both intrinsically and extrinsically, linked to employees’ performance, which means that employees that are satisfied with their job are those who are more productive (Pina e Cunha *et al*, 2007).

Several researchers have studied the relationship between communication and job satisfaction and have found a positive correlation between the two variables (Burton *et al*, 1976; Muchinsky, 1977; Madlock, 2008; Wulandari *et al*, 2011). Wulandari *et al* (2011) confirmed that communication openness is significantly related with all aspects of job satisfaction, and goes deeper in verifying that communication openness is positively related with employees’ satisfaction with both supervision and peers. In this sense, employees are rather more comfortable expressing their ideas and concerns and feeling that their superiors listen and take actions on what they express, creating a relaxed, calm and confident work environment. Since supervisors’ behavior has an important influence on their employees’ job satisfaction (Madlock, 2008), supervisor’s communication competence should also be a strong predictor of employee job satisfaction. Also, some dimensions of downward communication - influence, mobility,

desire for interaction, accuracy, summarization, gatekeeping and overload – have shown to have a significant positive correlation with job satisfaction (Muchinsky, 1977).

*Satisfaction with Communication as a key link between Communication Competence and both Trust in the Supervisor and Job Satisfaction*

Communication competence has not been studied as an individual skill, and while we can expect that it is related to employee outcomes such as trust in the supervisor and job satisfaction, we still know little about the process through which it occurs. In the organizational environment, communication and satisfaction with communication are hand in hand, which means that the type of communication employees are experiencing will affect the level of satisfaction with that communication. Therefore, when testing the relationship between communication competence and both trust and job satisfaction, we propose that satisfaction with communication plays an important role in these two relationships.

Communication satisfaction, as Zeffane (2012: 62) defines it, “refers to the extent to which employees feel they are listened to and that managers respect their plea.” Consequently, employee satisfaction with communication is a key factor in building the psychological factor between employees and their superiors. However, communication satisfaction is a multidimensional variable (Downs *et al*, 1977). The eight dimensions of communication satisfaction described by Downs are: *communication climate*, which reflects communication on both organizational and personal level, and includes estimates of whether or not people’s attitudes toward communicating are healthy in the organization; *supervisory communication*, that

includes both upward and downward aspects of communicating with superiors; *organizational integration*, that determines the degree to which individuals receive information about the immediate work environment; *media quality*, which deals with the extent to which meetings are well organized, written directives are short and clear, and the degree to which the amount of communication is about right; *co-worker communication*, concerning the extent to which horizontal and informal communication is accurate and free flowing; *corporate information*, which deals with information about the organization as a whole; *personal feedback*, concerning the workers' need to know how they are being judged and how their performances are being evaluated; and *subordinate communication*, that focuses on upward and downward communication with subordinates, directed only for workers in a supervisory role (Clampitt *et al*, 1993).

The link between communicator competence and satisfaction with communication was studied by Madlock (2008) with a sample of 220 individuals that worked for different companies in the Midwest, USA. The findings of this study concluded that supervisor communication competence was a strong predictor of both job satisfaction (as referred previously) and communication satisfaction, and in more detail, that communicator competence accounted for 68% of the variance of subordinate communication satisfaction and 18% of the variance in subordinate job satisfaction.

Pincus (1986) studied the relationship between satisfaction with communication and job satisfaction, using the Downs & Hazen Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire (1977), where the results indicated that all the eight dimensions of communication satisfaction (described earlier) had significant correlations with job satisfaction.



In this sense, it is important that companies are able to provide the necessary resources and train their supervisors to be competent communicators in order for their employees to be satisfied with the communication, and therefore experience high levels of job satisfaction, since low levels of job satisfaction can result on high levels of absenteeism and turnover (Madlock, 2008).

To the best of our knowledge, there are few studies regarding communication competence as an individual skill on the organizational life, therefore it is imperative that we deepen our knowledge on this theme. Among the eight dimensions of communication satisfaction, one will focus on the dimensions that directly relate with the supervisor's role: *Satisfaction with Supervisor Communication*, which is one of the important roles of the middle managers, and *Satisfaction with Organizational Integration*, since supervisors are agents and representatives of the organization, playing the role of interlocutors between employees and top management. So, one can predict the following relationships:

Hypothesis 1: The relationship between communicator competence and job satisfaction is mediated by satisfaction with supervisor communication.

Hypothesis 2: The relationship between communicator competence and job satisfaction is mediated by satisfaction with organizational integration.

Even though the relationship between an open and effective communication and trust has been studied, as referred previously (Ruppel *et al*, 2000; Thomas *et al*, 2009; Wulandari *et al*, 2011; Zeffane *et al*, 2011; Zeffane, 2012), there are no major developments on the current literature regarding the role of communication competence

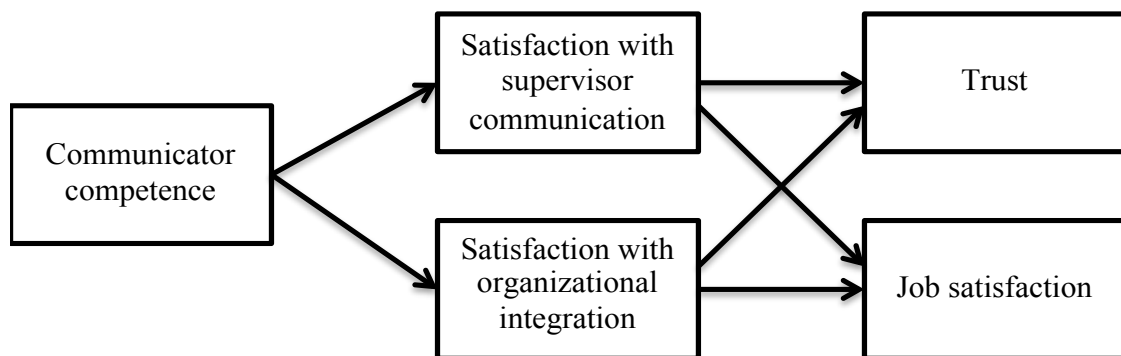
on mediating the relationships between communication satisfaction and both trust in the supervisor and job satisfaction. Therefore, one can predict the following relationships:

Hypothesis 3: The relationship between communicator competence and trust in the supervisor is mediated by satisfaction with supervisor communication.

Hypothesis 4: The relationship between communicator competence and trust in the supervisor is mediated by satisfaction with organizational integration.

The proposed model is presented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** Proposed model of analysis



## Method

### *Sample and Procedure*

The data were collected from employees of a Portuguese restaurant chain. The organization has 27 restaurants operating in Great Lisbon, Coimbra, Oporto and Faro, and 461 employees distributed by the restaurants and several departments such as Accounting, Human Resources, Control Operations, Maintenance and Marketing.

Twenty-one restaurants were asked to participate in the study by filling out a questionnaire, which represented 376 employees (the supervisors were excluded). From those, 33 questionnaires were dismissed by incorrect completion (9%) and 204 were properly filled, which represented a response rate of 63%. The questionnaires were distributed according to the number of employees registered in each store in the Human Resources database, and did not take into account those who were on holidays, sick or on maternity leave, deflating the response rate.

The responses per restaurant ranged from 2 to 20 questionnaires correctly completed, representing response rates ranging from 17% to 85%. Thirty six percent of the respondents were male, while 64% were female. The average age of the respondents was 33 years old, ranging from 18 to 69 years old. Most of the employees (59%) worked as service attendants, followed by the kitchen staff (32%), and only 9% worked in the cleaning services. Regarding their educational level, 52% of the respondents had at the most the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, 44% had completed the 12<sup>th</sup> grade and only 4% were attending graduation courses. The average number of months that employees worked with their current supervisor was 15 months, where 67% (137 employees) worked together for a year or less, 17% between one and two years, 6% between two and three years, and 10% worked with the same supervisor for more than 3 years, with the maximum of 7 years.

As employees had different schedules (morning, night or divided shift) and different breaks, they were asked to fill out the questionnaire and were given 3 to 4 days to hand it back. When distributing the questionnaires, the importance of the study, not only for external interests but also for internal purposes was explained, and the anonymity of the responses was highlighted. To avoid responses biased by fear or

interest of the supervisor, an employee of each store was asked to be in charge of the anonymous and proper collection of the filled questionnaires,

### *Measures*

A questionnaire was designed to study the relationship between the following measures: a) *Communicator Competence*, b) *Trust in the Supervisor*, c) *Communication Satisfaction*, divided into the sub-measures Satisfaction with *Organizational Integration* and *Satisfaction with Supervisory Communication* and d) *Job Satisfaction*.

The questionnaire was put together based on validated questionnaires in the existing literature. The questions were deliberately shuffled to avoid following the coherence of the measures and to oblige the respondents to be focused, and a catch question was inserted in the middle of the questionnaire to intercept random answers, in order to avoid the contamination of study.

*Communicator Competence* was assessed by 7 items adapted from the Communicator Competence Questionnaire developed by Monge *et al* (1982). One of the questions used was “My supervisor clearly expresses his ideas”, and Cronbach’s Alpha for the current study was .88.

*Trust in the Supervisor* was measured by 5 items of the Trust Scale developed by McAllister (1995), where the item “Most people, even those who are not close friends of the supervisor, trust and respect him as a colleague” was one of the questions, and Cronbach’s Alpha was .77.

*Communication Satisfaction* consisted of 2 distinct factors, adapted from the Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire (Downs and Hazen, 1977) by Deconinck *et al* (2008). The factors consisted of the satisfaction with communication concerning

*Organizational Integration* with 5 items (Cronbach's alpha was .85) and *Supervisory Communication* with 4 items (with an initial Cronbach's alpha of .48, the item "How satisfied am I with the extent to which my supervisor is open to ideas" was removed, increasing alpha to .75).

Finally, *Job Satisfaction* was measured by 7 items adapted from the Abridged Job in General scale, by Russel *et al* (2004). The items "Most of the time my job is... undesirable; disagreeable; poor) were reversely coded, and after eliminating the item "Most of the time my job is better than most", Cronbach's alpha went from .69 to .70.

All the scales but Communication Satisfaction were measured by 5-point Likert-type scale (Level of agreement, from 1="Totally disagree" to 5="Totally agree", where 3 was neutral – "Nor agree or disagree"). Communication Satisfaction was measured by the 5-point Likert-type scale through the Level of Satisfaction (from 1="Very dissatisfied" to 5="Very satisfied", where 3 assumes a neutral response – "Nor satisfied or dissatisfied").

## **Results**

The data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS statistical software. Pearson's correlation coefficient was computed to measure the relationships between the variables communicator competence, satisfaction with supervisor communication, satisfaction with organizational integration, trust in the supervisor and job satisfaction.

Descriptive statistics, correlations and Cronbach's alpha values are reported in table 1. It is possible to notice that correlations between all variables are significant.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics and correlations

	Mean <sup>a</sup>	SD	1	2	3.	4.	5.
1. Communicator competence	3.89	.60	(.88)				
2. Satisfaction with supervisor communication	3.73	.63	.66**	(.75)			
3. Satisfaction with organizational integration	3.31	.76	.52**	.67**	(.85)		
4. Trust	3.57	.71	.69**	.55**	.57**	(.77)	
5. Job satisfaction	3.84	.54	.44**	.47**	.47**	.45**	(.70)

a) 5-point scales.

b) Cronbach's alpha is reported in the diagonal.

\*\* Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Since communicator competence and trust in the supervisor were significantly related with the supervisors' competences and presented a high correlation, an exploratory factor analysis was performed to find if the items loaded on two different factors.

The results from exploratory factor analysis are presented in table 2. As we can see, the items load on the appropriate factor.

**Table 2.** Exploratory factor analysis

	Factor 1	Factor* 2
T: I have a sharing relationship with my supervisor. We freely share our ideas, feelings and hopes.		.54
T: Both I and my supervisor would have a sense of loss if one of us was transferred and we could not work together.		.87

T: If I shared my problems with my supervisor, I know he would respond constructively and interested.	.38
T: I have to admit that I and my supervisor made a considerable investment in our working relationship.	.43
T: Most people, even those who are not close friends of the supervisor, trust and respect him as a colleague.	.45
CC: My supervisor pays attention to what I say.	.75
CC: My supervisor treats me effectively.	.53
CC: My supervisor is a good listener.	.75
CC: My supervisor clearly expresses his ideas.	.56
CC: My supervisor says the right thing at the right time.	.67
CC: My supervisor is an easy person to talk to.	.73
CC: My supervisor usually responds quickly to messages (memos, calls, reports).	.51

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\*Extraction method: Principal Axis Factoring. Rotation Method: Principal Axis Factoring. Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in 10 interactions. Loadings below 0,35 are not presented.

The formulated hypotheses were tested using hierarchical linear regression. Communication competence was positively related with the two communication satisfaction dimensions: supervisor communication ( $B=.66$ ;  $p<.01$ ) and organizational integration ( $B=.52$ ;  $p<.01$ ), meaning that higher levels of communication competence were associated to greater satisfaction with supervisor communication and organizational integration, where communication competence explained 43% and 27% of the variance of the two communication satisfaction dimensions, respectively (table 3).

**Table 3.** Regression analysis for satisfaction with supervisor communication and satisfaction with organizational integration

Step	Dependent variable	Predictor variables	B	t	p	R <sup>2</sup>
1	Satisfaction with supervisor communication	Communication competence	.66	12.41	.00	.43
1	Satisfaction with organizational integration	Communication competence	.52	8.55	.00	.27

Moreover, higher communication competence was also associated with greater trust in the supervisor ( $B=.71$ ;  $p<.01$ ), explaining 50% of its variance (table 4); and associated with greater job satisfaction ( $B=.46$ ;  $p<.01$ ), explaining 21% of its variance (table 5).

**Table 4.** Mediated regression analysis for trust in the supervisor

Step	Predictor variables	B	t	p	$\Delta R^2$	R <sup>2</sup>
1	Communication competence	.71	14.20	.00	.50	.50
2	Communication competence	.57	8.84	.00		
	Satisfaction with supervisor communication	.00	-0.05	.96		
	Satisfaction with organizational integration	.26	4.07	.00	.05	.55

**Table 5.** Mediated regression analysis for job satisfaction

Step	Predictor variables	B	t	P	$\Delta R^2$	R <sup>2</sup>
1	Communication competence	.46	7.38	.00	.21	.21
2	Communication competence	.23	2.83	.01		
	Satisfaction with supervisor communication	.16	1.73	.09		
	Satisfaction with organizational integration	.24	2.93	.00	.07	.28



To further test the mediation effects, the z-prime Method developed by MacKinnon, Lockwood and Hoffman (1998) was applied. MacKinnon *et al* (2002) demonstrated that this method provides more power and a lesser Type 1 error rate than the procedure outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986). The z-prime method calculates the indirect effect (mediation) of the independent variable on the outcome variable using the Z distribution. Also, the following conditions must be met: a) the effect of the mediator on the outcome must be significant, b) the effect of the independent variable on the mediator must be significant, c) the indirect effect must also be significant.

As described previously, the second condition was met for all 4 hypotheses. However, on Hypothesis 1 the effect of the mediator, satisfaction with supervisor communication, on the outcome, job satisfaction, controlling for communication competence was not significant ( $B=.16$ ;  $p>.05$ ), rejecting hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 formulated that satisfaction with organizational integration would mediate the relationship between communication competence and job satisfaction. While controlling for communication competence, the effect of the mediator satisfaction with organizational integration on job satisfaction presented significant values ( $B=.24$ ;  $p<.01$ ). Finally, the z-prime test of mediation was statistically significant ( $Z'=4.05$ ,  $p<.01$ ) supporting the hypothesis that satisfaction with organizational integration partially mediated the relationship between communicator competence and job satisfaction, since communication competence still has a significant direct effect on job satisfaction.

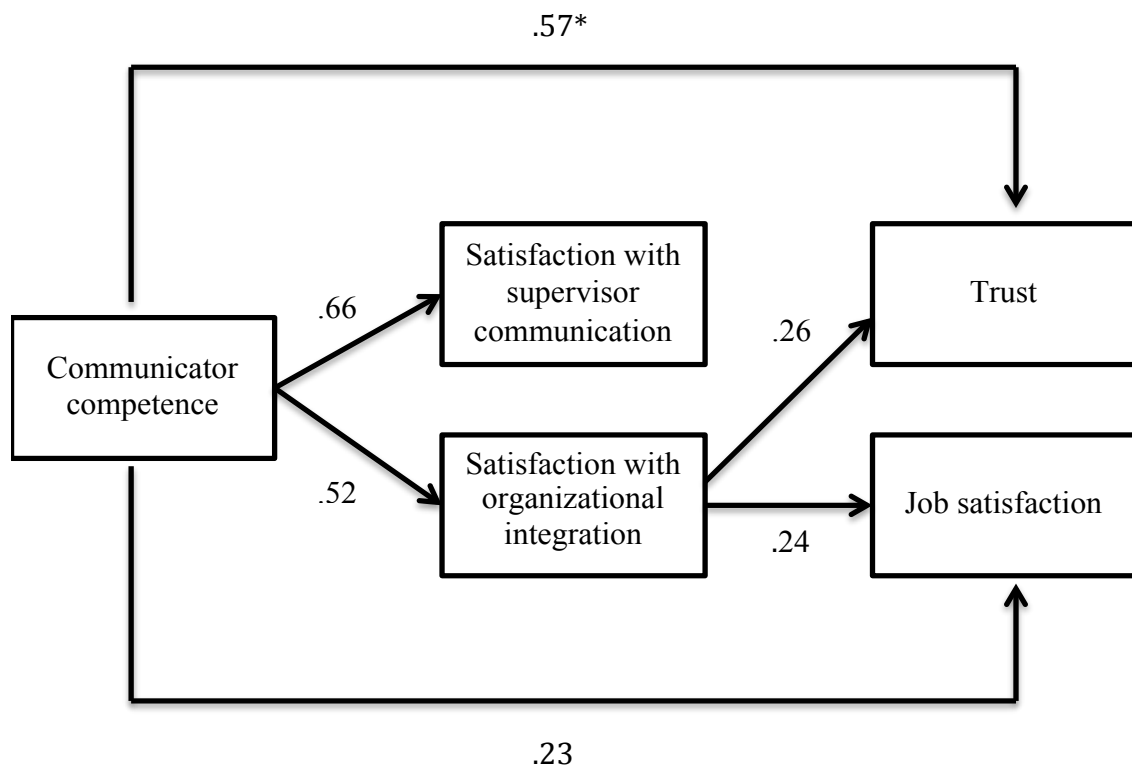
Hypothesis 3 suggested that the relationship between communicator competence and trust would be mediated by satisfaction with supervisor communication. As seen previously, the effect of communication competence on the mediator satisfaction with

communication was significant. However, the effect of the mediator on the dependent variable trust controlling for communication competence was not significant ( $B=0$ ;  $p>.05$ ), rejecting the third hypothesis.

Finally, hypothesis 4 formulated a relationship between communication competence and trust mediated by satisfaction with organizational integration. After controlling for the exogenous variable, the effect of the mediator satisfaction with organizational integration on the outcome trust in the supervisor presented significant values ( $B=.26$ ;  $p<.01$ ). The indirect effects were confirmed by the test of mediation that presented significant effects ( $Z'=4.41$ ;  $p<.01$ ), confirming hypothesis 4.

With the previous results, the initial model was reformulated (Figure 2).

**Figure 2.** Reformulated model of analysis



\* Beta values

## Discussion

The purpose of this research was to study the mediating role of satisfaction with supervisor communication and satisfaction with organizational integration, which are communication satisfaction dimensions, in the relationship between communication competence and both job satisfaction and trust in the supervisor.

The role that communication plays on the organizational life is a subject of great importance and many researchers have studied its positive impacts (Thomas *et al*, 2009; Zeffane, 2012; Wulandari *et al*, 2011; Varona, 1996; and Zeffane, 2012). However, there is scarce empirical evidence on the effects of communication competence on the organizational life, particularly the impact it has on satisfaction with communication, trust in the supervisor and job satisfaction. This study provides some evidence on those relationships.

As expected and confirmed in previous studies (Madlock, 2008; Pincus, 1986), communication competence and job satisfaction presented a significant relationship. A new finding was that communication competence is correlated with trust in the supervisor. Also, communication competence presented a significant positive impact on the mediators' satisfaction with supervisory communication and satisfaction with organizational integration, confirming Madlock's (2008) findings that communicator competence was a strong predictor of communication satisfaction. Unexpectedly, the relationships between communication competence and both job satisfaction and trust in the supervisor mediated by satisfaction with supervisor communication were non significant. However, satisfaction with organizational integration partially mediated the relationships between communication competence and both job satisfaction and trust in the supervisor.

These results may be explained by the role that supervisors have on organizations. Supervisors have to be able to provide a quality feedback to their subordinates, and have to assume the role of agents and representatives of the organization, being interlocutors between the upward and downward hierarchy relationship. Therefore, they also assume the role of the agents responsible for the integration of the subordinates into the “organizational family”. In this sense, even though supervisors’ communication competences have a positive impact on both employees’ trust and job satisfaction, satisfaction with supervisory communication does not influence this relationship. However, satisfaction with organizational integration plays the important role of mediator on the relationship between communicator competence and both trust and job satisfaction. One possible reason for this finding may be explained, as referred before, by the role that supervisors assume of agents that make the connection between subordinates and top management, being responsible for delivering the news, updates, procedures, financial standings and organizational achievements, in order to make employees feel part of the organizational environment. This is particularly important in an organization where departments (in the case of this research, restaurants) are physically located in different places. In this sense, it is important that organizations are able to provide the adequate training regarding the middle management’s communication competence skills, since it will lead to a greater employee satisfaction with organizational integration, and therefore resulting in greater levels of trust in the supervisor and job satisfaction.

Nonetheless, there are some limitations that should be acknowledged. First, all variables were measured in a cross-sectional design, raising concerns regarding the interpretation of causality inferences, and therefore should be interpreted with caution.

Another possible limitation of the present study is the common method variance, since the data were collected using self-reports, which may have inflated the relationship between some of the variables collected from the same source. Finally, the context in which the data were collected may raise some concerns regarding the stability and generalizability of the interaction effect to other samples, since the data were collected from a single Portuguese restaurant chain, which does not represent other organizations, cultures or industries.

The present study opens space for future research. Although research has shown that communication competence impacts on job satisfaction and satisfaction with communication (Madlock 2008), to the best of our knowledge little is known regarding communication competence as an individual skill on the organizational life. Therefore, future research should focus on other outcomes of communication competence such as job performance and commitment to the organization, since it is an important skill that can be trained in order to leverage those outcomes.

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